

Winter 2005



# **Disability Services Beacon**

Information and Resources from the  
Fairfax Area Disability Services Board

## **Assistive Technology - What Can It Do for You?**

To many of us, technological changes seem to happen at the speed of light. In the past, significant technological developments happened every twenty years or so, but now they seem to happen every twenty minutes. People with disabilities often have the most to gain from such rapid technological development.

Technology that enables persons with a disability to maintain or improve their ability to function in daily life is called assistive technology. Assistive technology can run the gamut from simple low-cost items that help many people do something better (such as vegetable peelers with big rubber

handles) to expensive, high-tech equipment useful to a select few (such as voice synthesizers on laptop communication boards). Other examples of assistive technology include:

- Hand controls in vehicles that control the brakes and gas
- Power wheelchairs
- Cochlear implants
- Switches that turn something on or off
- Voice recognition software
- Remotes that control devices such as televisions, stereos, and doors
- Sticky plastic that can hold items in place

No matter how significant the impairment caused by a disability, assistive technology can do much to mitigate that impairment. Through assistive technology, people with disabilities both hidden and significant can lead fulfilling lives in their communities. There are assistive technology devices and services for people in every walk of life.

Assistive technology works best when it meets the individual needs of the person using it. While low-tech low-cost technology options can be tried often with little cost but high-tech, expensive options sometime require substantial training to use successfully. Getting an assistive technology assessment is an important first step towards getting the right assistive technology.

Assessments are available from different sources. Children enrolled in public schools and receiving special education services can get assistive technology assessments through the individualized education program (IEP) process. Fairfax County Public Schools' Integrated Technology Services (ITS) provides assessments as well as equipment and training. For adults, assistive technology assessments are routinely performed at rehabilitation centers, centers for independent living, universities, and disability advocacy organizations. Often, in order for insurance to pay for an assistive technology product, an assessment by a professional such as an occupational therapist is needed. Local organizations that provide assessments and

opportunities to try out equipment are the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind, the Endependence Center of Northern Virginia, the Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons, and United Cerebral Palsy. Contact information for all is available starting on page 6.

Access Services of the Fairfax County Public Library provides resources for patrons with disabilities, including those who cannot leave their homes, are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, or have a physical disability. They have a variety of equipment that can help patrons use computers, including the Internet, and enjoy books and other media. In addition, each branch library has an assistive workstation equipped with 21 inch screens and a large print software program that can magnify printed material up to 16 times. They offer various “zoom window” and screen-panning options, as well as built-in text-to-speech software. Several branches have meeting rooms that contain assistive listening systems which amplify sound for persons who are

hearing impaired. Contact information is on page 6.

In addition to helping with daily activities, assistive technology can make the difference between a successful work environment and one that isn't. Local centers for independent living, such as the Endependence Center of Northern Virginia, and the Department of Rehabilitative Services, provide employment help that includes finding the right assistive technology. In addition, the Job Accommodation Network provides information to callers and Web site visitors about job-related assistive technology.

The commonwealth of Virginia believes strongly in the need for assistive technology and its benefits. In response to that need, the state established the Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) to provide access to assistive technology information, devices, services, and funding for all Virginians. In addition to the central office, five regional sites provide local technical assistance throughout the state. The local office for Northern Virginia, called VATS North, is housed at the Center for Human

disAbilities at George Mason University. They provide information on assistive technology as well as screenings, demonstrations, and trainings. There is a cost involved with many of their services.

### **Contact Information**

**Access Services**, Fairfax County Public Library, 703-324-8380, TTY 703-324-8365, e-mail [access@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:access@fairfaxcounty.gov), [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/as](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/as).

**The Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority**, 1-866-835-5976, TTY 1-804-662-9000, [www.atlfa.org](http://www.atlfa.org).

**Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind**, 202-454-6400 or 1-877-324-5252, TTY 711, e-mail [info@clb.org](mailto:info@clb.org), [www.clb.org](http://www.clb.org).

**Endependence Center of Northern Virginia**, 703-525-3268, TTY 703-525-3553, [www.ecnv.org](http://www.ecnv.org).

**Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**, Voice/TTY 1-800-526-7234, <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>.

**Northern Virginia Resource Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**, 703-352-9055, TTY 703-352-9056, [www.nvrc.org](http://www.nvrc.org)

**United Cerebral Palsy of the Washington DC and Northern Virginia Area**, 202-526-1652, TTY 711, [www.ucpdc.org](http://www.ucpdc.org).

**Virginia Assistive Technology System** in Richmond, 1-800-552-5019, Web: [www.vats.org](http://www.vats.org).  
**VATS North**, the Center for Human disAbilities, George Mason University, Voice/TTY 703-993-3670, Voice/TTY 1-800-333-7958 (V/T); [www.kihd.gmu.edu/vatsnorth/index.htm](http://www.kihd.gmu.edu/vatsnorth/index.htm).

**Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired**, Voice/TTY 1-800-622-2155, Voice/TTY 1-804-371-3140, [www.vdbvi.org](http://www.vdbvi.org).

**Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**, Voice/TTY 1-800-552-7917, 804-662-9502, [www.vddhh.org](http://www.vddhh.org).

**Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services,**  
1-800-552-5019, TTY 1-800-464-9950,  
[www.vadrs.org](http://www.vadrs.org).

## **Funding Assistive Tech**

Assistive technology devices and services can often be funded by insurance plans, including Medicare and Medicaid, vocational rehabilitation programs, and work incentive programs. Depending on the nature of the assistive technology and its uses, work-related devices may be paid by employers. Technology that is needed in the classroom and is identified on a student's Individualized Education Plan will be provided by the school system. For both education and employment related technology, the school or employer may put restrictions on whether and how the technology may be used at home.

However, there are times when assistive technology isn't covered. In those cases, the Virginia Assistive Technology System provides a resource guide to help readers find funding. VATS



also maintains an equipment exchange that can be a lower cost option for some. The Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority, a program of the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services in conjunction with SunTrust Bank, offers a program of statewide affordable loans to Virginians with disabilities. A special feature of ATLFA is the Consumer Service Fund, a “fund of last resort” for persons with disabilities who have been unable to obtain needed funding from all other sources. ATLFA has also begun a new program that provides loans for equipment that would allow people with disabilities to telework. For contact information on the ATLFA, see page 6.

### AT Web Sites

The Internet remains one of the most comprehensive sources of information on assistive technology. Some Web sites worth exploring are:

- **www.abledata.com.** The Web site features a database of over 17,000 assistive technology products for persons with a disability, including

product reviews, conference listings, classified ads, etc. Most products are sold through catalogues or by mail order.

- **www.assistivetech.net.** This informative site contains resources on products, statistics, and research projects related to assistive technology.
- **www.enablemart.com.** One-stop shopping for assistive technology products.
- **www.ittatc.org.** The Information Technology Technical Assistance and Training Center's Web site is devoted to making the Internet and all telecommunications accessible to people with disabilities.
- **www.idonline.org.** This site is specifically dedicated to the use of assistive technology for persons with learning disabilities.
- **www.workrerc.org.** Like the Job Accommodation Network, this Web site is

devoted to employment related accommodations and assistive technology.

**Virginia Caregivers Grant Program** is now open! It provides up to \$500.00 for caregivers of a relative with a disability. Applications for the year 2004 must be submitted no earlier than Feb 1, 2005, and not later than May 1, 2005. To download the application, go to [www.dss.virginia.gov/family/as/caregivegrant.html](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/as/caregivegrant.html) or call 703-324-5485, TTY 703-449-1186.

**Fairfax Area  
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## **Get Weekly Disability News**

Disability Services E-News is a listserv that keeps subscribers informed about resources and issues that affect people with physical and sensory disabilities.

The listserv sends out one brief e-mail each week. The listserv is the primary vehicle for publicly announcing meetings and activities of the Disability Services Board and will in the future tell you how to get online issues of the *Disability Services Beacon*.

## Disability Services Beacon

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To subscribe, simply go to [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/email/lists/](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/email/lists/). Fill in your e-mail address, click on the box before “Disability services and news,” and then click subscribe. You will be sent an e-mail asking you to respond in order to finish subscribing. You must respond to this e-mail and write “ok” in the body to complete the subscription.

Fairfax County is committed to nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in all county programs, services, and activities. This document is available in alternative formats upon request. Please call 703-324-5421 or TTY 703-449-1186, or send an email to [disabilityservices@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:disabilityservices@fairfaxcounty.gov). Allow 7 working days for preparation of the material.

## **The Next DSB Meeting is**

on the second Monday  
of the month, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Government Center  
12000 Gov. Ctr. Parkway  
Fairfax

Meetings are open to the public; public comment, no more than 3 minutes in length, is welcome during the public comment period. For information or to request accommodations, please call 703-324-5421, TTY 703-449-1186, or send an e-mail to [disabilityservices@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:disabilityservices@fairfaxcounty.gov) 5 working days prior to the meeting.